



**Comments on Implementation of the  
Every Student Succeeds Act**

**Informal Hearing of the  
House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee  
March 8, 2017**

Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato, and members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, my name is Dr. Eric Eshbach, superintendent of the Northern York County School District and chair of the PASA Legislative Committee. I am here today with Amber Gunning, Guidance Counselor at Northern High School. Mrs. Gunning has served as a high school counselor for two years and prior to that was an Academic Advisor and Adjunct Instructor at Harrisburg Area Community College.

Thank you for providing the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) the opportunity to provide comments regarding higher education funding opportunities for military enlistees and officer candidates, and the role of military recruiters and school districts in providing high school students access to these funds. PASA is comprised of nearly 800 members including school district superintendents and other school system leaders engaged in the ongoing work of improving and enhancing student achievement and public education in Pennsylvania.

PASA believes that service in the United States Military is an excellent career path for many high school graduates, and we support the efforts of military recruiters to explain the career and scholarship opportunities available for our high school juniors and seniors. More than 1.3 million Americans have made a decision to serve their country as active duty members of our military and another 350,000 serve in the reserves. These brave men and women who heed the call of their nation to serve in the United States military are some of the most dedicated, selfless individuals this county has to offer and are deserving of every citizen's respect.

Choosing to enter the military does not require students to give up their goal of achieving a college education, and our students should be aware of the scholarship and educational opportunities provided to them through military service. No matter the branch of military service a student chooses, there are a number of college scholarships and grants available that can be a great option for young adults. In much the same way we welcome college admission counselors, we are in contact with recruiters from the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy as we seek to provide the best post-graduate opportunity for each student preparing for life after Northern High School.

Our school district boasts a strong commitment from graduates to enlist, averaging over 5% of our graduating class each year over the last ten years. It is certainly humbling and inspiring to see the large number of young men and women who stand to be recognized at commencement ceremonies each June. I realize this same level of commitment may not be held by all high schools and school districts throughout the Commonwealth. Our comments today aim to identify ways we can increase the level of commitment to this essential function of our state, our nation, and our democracy.

PASA understands that service in the United States military is an excellent option for high school students to consider in regard to their career path. Public school leaders and educators have long valued military service to our nation as an excellent way to begin adult life. Many of our members have served, as have the staff and school board members who help to shape the education, goals and aspirations of our youth.

In 2002, the United States Congress passed two major pieces of legislation that generally require local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving assistance under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to give military recruiters the same access to secondary school students as they provide to postsecondary institutions or to prospective employers. LEAs are also generally required to provide students' names, addresses, and telephone listings to military recruiters, when requested.

Parents do have the right to opt their children out of any contact with the military and we, by law, must honor those requests. Even in our high school, with a strong commitment to providing military recruiters access to our students and in a geographic location conducive to housing active and retired military, each year we have parents who choose to opt their children out of contact with military recruiters. Currently, we have over 100 parents of juniors and seniors who have exercised this right. This would represent about 20% of our students in those grade levels.

We understand that some school districts have concerns about access for military recruiters. And perhaps some educators place less value on military careers compared to higher education opportunities for graduating students. We believe that these issues are best resolved through professional development and training

of our educators. In the Northern York County School District, we have sent two of our guidance counselors, including Mrs. Gunning, to the United States Marine Corp Training for Educators at Parris Island to provide them with a better understanding of what awaits our students when they enter the military. I have asked Mrs. Gunning to share with you her experience.

“The Marine Corps Educators Workshop is an opportunity for school staff to experience a glimpse of what the training for a Marine would look like. Educators are transported to Parris Island in South Carolina for a four-day, hands-on workshop. The workshop included physically demanding challenges.

“As educators, we were treated as new recruits, including having to line up on the yellow footprints that all new Marine recruits stand on as they begin their training. The drill instructors were firm and demanded our full attention. We were given very little information as to what to expect from each day. Each challenge gave us better insight into the emotions that a young Marine may experience. As we progressed through the workshop, the Marines gave us a better understanding as to why they train as they do. Every aspect of the training is intentional and focused on the best way to prepare a new Marine.

“When I signed up for this workshop, I truly had no idea of what to expect. Personally, having two brothers that have served in the armed services, one Navy and one Army National Guard, I have seen the benefit for many who choose to enter the armed services. However, through attending the Marine Corp Educators Workshop, I realized that there was much I didn’t know. For example, I did not have a clear understanding of the difference of the various branches and the opportunities that can be provided by entering the service. This workshop sparked a desire to become better informed so that I can provide insight for the many

students and parents that I have the privilege to work with. I am thankful for my district's allowing me to have the opportunity to attend. "

I think you will agree that the experience Mrs. Gunning and her colleague had at Parris Island has helped to identify specific qualities in students who will flourish and be successful in the Marines and other branches of military service. It is our belief that this type of first-hand experience for educators helps to break any existing stigma that would discourage students from considering the armed forces.

While it is sometimes necessary to ensure compliance through legislation, PASA does not believe that legislation is necessary to improve the access of military recruiters to our schools or to ensure that our students are provided with important information regarding higher education opportunities for students joining the military. It is not simply a matter of access. It is a matter of informed guidance and the direction our staff can provide to a student. Instead, we encourage incentivizing programs such as the Parris Island experience, so that educators are more likely to participate.

As you may know, professional educators are required to obtain 180 hours of continuing education every five years in accordance with Act 48. A similar program for administrators is codified in Act 45. Training opportunities that include the acquisition of Act 48 hours for teachers and counselors and Act 45 hours for administrators could be a meaningful way to encourage educators to become better versed in the higher educational opportunities offered by the military.

The requirements set forth by PDE for a program to qualify for Act 48 or Act 45 hours is, understandably, quite stringent. But, as Mrs. Gunning's experience shows, training opportunities such as the Parris Island experience could and should qualify

for these essential continuing education hours. In my opinion, it would be much more appropriate for a guidance counselor to earn hours for a program that truly provides a positive impact on a student's future, rather than some of the programs they are currently required to attend.

PASA stands ready to partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Education in conjunction with other educational agencies to develop a set of recommendations to assist school administrators, counselors, and teachers with training to better understand the higher education opportunities for students through military service. School districts across our state participate in hundreds of programs that enable us to pool and share resources and opportunities between many school districts. Our intermediate units were developed on the expectation that shared services provide a programmatic and financial benefit to school districts. Venues such as regional recruitment fairs at an intermediate unit or university could serve as one way to share services between a dozen or more school districts. We can envision intermediate unit programs that provide direct access for educators, as well as students and their parents, to recruiters and higher education officials to explain military scholarships in greater depth.

PASA is willing to assist the Committee in this effort and provide representation to any task force or work group that may be assigned to review this matter. We look forward to working with you as requested. We thank you for the opportunity to present testimony this morning and will be happy to answer any questions at this time.